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THE PULPIT IN RELATION TO RACE ELEVATION.

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OF all the influences at work in the uplifting of our people there is none that is comparable to the pulpit—to the power of an intelligent and virtuous and pious ministry. Whatever may be said of the pulpit as it exists at present, however its past history may seem to belie this statement, it is nevertheless true. It has a natural advantage in reaching the masses for good over all other instrumentalities. Associated, as it is, in the minds of the people with religion, with the service of God, with all that is highest and purest and best in character and life, it inspires in the very beginning confidence to the degree that is true of no other calling. The presumption is that the minister is a good man. The people naturally look up to him, and are disposed, in virtue of his position, to give him a hearing such as is given to no other man. That this reverence for the office has been, in a measure, destroyed by the large influx of unprincipled men into the ministry is a fact to be regretted, but enough of it yet remains, however, to give the minister still a decided advantage. It affords also exceptional opportunities for knowing the people and, therefore, of forming a correct estimate of their real character and wants. No one is so frequently called upon as the minister; no one is so often in the homes of the people; no one is so largely confided in, or is kept so fully informed of all that is going on in the private and public life of the community, especially the darker side of it. If there is any rottenness anywhere, he will be sure to be informed of it. It also affords opportunities of reaching the ears of the people, such as is afforded by no other calling. Once at least during the week, and three times on the Sabbath, morning, afternoon and evening, they meet together publicly to hear what the minister has to say. Whatever may be said of our people in the South in other respects, they are certainly a Church-going people. The churches, as a general thing, are always crowded, and thus through them an opportunity is afforded of sowing the precious seeds of truth, by means of which they are to be largely elevated, such as is to be found nowhere else. Thus, independently of personal qualities, ministers have advantages that are possessed by no other class of men. This fact is well understood, and is one of the reasons why such large numbers are flocking into the ministry, attracted, as we are forced to believe, in many cases by the advantages of the position, with little

or no thought of the high and solemn responsibilities which it involves. To whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required, is a principle, therefore, that needs to be strongly emphasized in connection with the exercise of the high functions of the ministry, and especially at this time, in connection with the great and important work of race elevation. The power which it confers is to be exercised, in every instance and under all circumstances, in the fear of God, and with an earnest desire to uplift the people. It should never be prostituted to base purposes, or be employed for personal or selfish ends of greed or ambition. It is a talent entrusted to us, for the use of which we shall all give an account in the last great day. It is a question, therefore, that we should all frequently ask ourselves, especially those of us who are living in the South, How are we using this power? We are called upon to minister to a people who have just emerged, as it were, from slavery—crude, ignorant, with very imperfect ideas of duty, with a low moral standard, and with the moral sense but imperfectly developed. In the simplest duties of life, in the principles of a just morality, in all the elements that give strength and delicacy and beauty to character—truth, and honesty, and purity, and sobriety—they need to be instructed, line upon line and precept upon precept. They need to be instructed in the most elementary principles of religion, in the proper way of worshipping God, in the manner of conducting themselves in the house of God, in all that goes to make up church etiquette, and especially in the difference between purity, which consists in the love and fear of God, in holiness of character and life, and mere noise and emotion, which enter so largely into the popular conception of religion. The work to be done is great, inexpressibly great. Only those of us who are in the field, and who have had an opportunity of mingling with the people, can form any conception of its magnitude. That some of our ministers appreciate their position in relation to this work, and are addressing themselves earnestly to it, is a matter for congratulation. But this is true, unfortunately, only of a few. The great majority of our pulpits are not only doing nothing to elevate the masses, but are positive obstacles in the way of all true progress, a curse instead of a blessing. I have often felt that it would be a great deal better for the race if many of these pulpits were vacant, and the churches themselves blotted out of existence. I have seen such shameful perversions of power, such truckling, such low pandering to the worst tastes of the people, on the part of the pulpit, that I cannot even think of it without growing hot with indignation; especially, as in many cases, it is by men who know better, men of intelligence, but who, for the sake of a little cheap popularity or for the loaves and fishes, are base enough to degrade themselves, and to encourage the people to continue in their ignorance and degradation. Surely if there is one place in hell hotter than another, it will be reserved for such pious frauds, such religious demagogues, such traitors to Heaven and to the highest interests of the people. Such men are a disgrace to the ministry, a

curse to the Church and a dishonor to the race, and the sooner they are driven out of our pulpits the better it will be. I said to a brother minister not long ago: "Do you know that you occupy by far the most important position in this city? You are the pastor of the largest church here; you speak to the largest number of souls; you have opportunities, therefore, of influencing the people for good, such as are enjoyed by no other man in this city. I hope you realize this?" I addressed him in this way, not so much because I felt that he specially needed the admonition, for he is a most excellent man, and seems alive to a sense of his responsibilities, but rather with a view of intensifying and giving permanence to that feeling. And so, in like manner, in bringing this article to a close, I would say to all of our brethren in the ministry, especially to those of us who are living in the South: Let us pause and consider how much there is to be done, and try to realize the importance of the position we occupy in relation to this work. We have opportunities for usefulness such as no other class of men possess. Let us be faithful to these opportunities, conscientiously using them not for the furtherance of private or personal ends, but for the general good, for encouraging and setting into operation influences that will redound to the glory of God and the best interests of the people, showing them by our upright and consistent lives, by the character of our pulpit ministrations, by our fearlessness in presenting the truth, and in dealing with all practical questions affecting character and life, that we are seeking not theirs, but them; not their applause or their possessions, but their highest moral and spiritual welfare.

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